EXPANDING U.S. ARMY LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

EXPANDING U.S. ARMY LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

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ABSTRACT

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The future international security environment is increasingly characterized as one of persistent conflict where a growing number of state and non-state actors will use violence in pursuit of their objectives. To meet this challenge the U.S. Army is trying to answer the question of how to train individual soldiers to effectively meet this future challenge. As recent experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has shown, soldiers with cultural awareness and linguistic ability are critical to successful operations. This paper will examine the U.S. Army effort to meet the requirement for additional personnel with cultural awareness and language capabilities. Though the Army's various programs will be looked at, focus will be placed on the Army's efforts to home-grow officers with cultural and language training.   The premise of this paper is that the plan for evolutionary expansion of the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program will not meet future demands. To show this, FAO training methodologies, assignment practices, and forecasted requirements for officers with FAO type skills will be discussed. The paper will close with recommendations for changes in the training methodology that would build the larger force of officers with cultural and language skills required in the future.

EXPANDING U.S. ARMY LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

Cultural knowledge enables soldiers and leaders to understand the "how and why" of foreign cultures and the roles that culture, religion and geography play in military operations. Foreign language capability enhances cross-cultural communication to facilitate mission success. Foreign language capability is expanding beyond the roles of professional linguists to every soldier and leader. Language can be a survival tool as well as an entrée to the cultural capability that is crucial to every soldier and leader. The human dimension in which the Army must operate as part of today's complex environments necessitates that soldiers at all levels possess some cultural and foreign language capability. It is no longer sufficient solely for limited numbers of soldiers in specialized skill sets and units to possess theses capabilities.[1]

Recent military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have been conducted in much more volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous combat environments than any previously encountered by U.S. military forces. While combat remains the crucial activity in warfare, "there is much more to winning wars than defeating enemy forces in combat."[2] In fact, combat operations comprise only one of four categories of activities U.S. forces are currently engaged in.[3]

The four categories of activity that comprise nearly every mission U.S. forces are called upon to carry out in Afghanistan and Iraq include combat, security, engagement, and relief and reconstruction.[4] Historically, combat operations have been the principal focus, the raison d'être, of the U.S. Army. However, recent experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan have created a widespread acknowledgement that security, engagement, and relief and reconstruction operations are as essential to victory as combat operations and that the associated competencies are required of all soldiers.[5]

These operations are population centric and are oriented on the general populace, rather than on the enemy. They take place among the population at large and require promoting friendly influence and authority, and most importantly, winning

the support of the populace.[6] Therefore, to successfully accomplish these missions U.S. forces need to be culturally savvy and understand the social dynamics, social networks, local and tribal politics, and cultural mores of the population, and to be able to communicate effectively in the various languages spoken in their area of operations.[7]

The need to know the enemy, and in similar fashion to understand the population within which today's operations are being conducted, has long been recognized. As the most ancient of military theorists, Sun Tzu, put it, "Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril."[8] Or as expressed more recently by Ralph Peters, a modern military theorist, "Language skills and cultural grasp that foster adroit and swift evaluations of the multi-dimensional conflict environment comprise, in military jargon, a major combat multiplier. Wars are won by officers who know the smell of the streets."[9]

As Mr. Peters points out, language skills and cultural awareness are critical to the commander's ability to understand the operational environment. Cultural awareness allows the commander on the ground to understand the role that culture plays in his unit's operations, while language capability provides the cross-cultural communication with host nation security forces and the population at large that is required for mission success.[10] This was proven conclusively over the past decade during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and has been a common theme of the lessons learned reports from the various units that have deployed to one of the two theaters of operation.

Soon after operations in Afghanistan and Iraq commenced, the Department of Defense (DoD) and senior U.S. Army leaders realized there was a problem. DoD as a whole, and the U.S. Army in particular, just did not have the numbers of culturally

attuned and linguistically capable soldiers in the ranks to meet operational needs. This realization triggered a DoD-wide effort to increase the number of military members with the requisite cultural awareness and language skills.[11]

This paper will examine the U.S. Army effort to meet the requirement for personnel with the requisite cultural awareness and language capabilities to meet forecasted operational needs. Though the Army's various programs will be looked at, focus will be placed on the Army's efforts to home-grow officers with cultural and language training.   The premise of this paper is that the Army's plan for evolutionary expansion of the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program will not meet future operational demands. To clarify this, FAO program training methodologies and assignment policies will first be discussed. After considering the future requirements for officers with FAO type skills, recommendations will be made that would help build the larger force of officers with cultural and language skills that will be required.

Army Programs

The prevalence of nontraditional roles played by large numbers of general purpose forces during recent military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the complementary need for language ability and cultural awareness, forced the Department of Defense to take a critical look at the level of language ability, regional expertise and cultural awareness in the ranks.[12]   As a result, DoD has "explicitly identified language and regional proficiency as critical warfighting skills to be integrated into future operations to ensure that combat forces deploy with the essential ability"[13] to effectively communicate with foreign military personnel and the population at large.

In 2005, the Office of the Secretary of Defense published the Defense Language Roadmap. In 2006, the Secretary of Defense, via the Quadrennial Defense Review,

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directed DoD organizations to increase funding for language and cultural awareness training.[14] The Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, as the DoD Senior Language Authority, provided additional implementing guidance to the services that "identifies foreign language training and regional proficiency as a mission-critical skill" and sets language and regional proficiency goals and standards DoD-wide.[15]

The U.S. Army responded with a number of initiatives to improve the language ability and cultural awareness of its soldiers and officers. Recognizing that all leaders and soldiers must be able to apply foreign language skills and cultural knowledge to operational planning and execution, the Army developed an "organized and integrated approach to culture and foreign language education and training."[16] This approach includes efforts to train units as a whole as well as efforts to train individuals prior to and throughout their years of service.

The Army's unit focused training initiatives target the culture generalist and nonprofessional linguist. To this end the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command opened a Culture Center at Fort Huachuca that has developed modular training programs for use at Army institutional training centers.[17] However, these cultural training programs are fairly rudimentary in nature and are intended to provide only generalized, broad-spectrum cultural training.

For training more focused on a specific country, location or culture, Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) from the Culture Center will bring the training to units prior to deployment to a war zone.[18] Though more comprehensive and specific than that provided at Army institutional schools, MTT training still provides only rudimentary

training in culture and language. To develop any level of expertise, more time-consuming and expensive individual training is required.

The Army's individual training initiatives include both pre and post-commissioning efforts. Pre-commissioning programs at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and in the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) have expanded their language and cultural training programs.[19] West Point has established the Center for Language, Culture and Regional Studies, requires all cadets to take a foreign language and has doubled the amount of semester hours required for language studies.[20] Additionally, West Point has increased study abroad opportunities by 13-fold in the effort to culturally attune cadets.[21]

ROTC has also expanded efforts to ensure more cadets receive language and cultural training prior to commissioning. Twelve universities were provided grants in 2008 to establish programs to increase language proficiency in targeted languages, and eight more schools received grants in 2009.[22] Further, ROTC cadets are now offered a monetary incentive to study targeted languages under the newly developed Officer Accessions Pilot Program.[23]

Still other initiatives are aimed at acquiring individuals with language skills gained prior to joining the Army.   Given the fact that developing a satisfactory working language capability can take years, and that developing a native language capability may not be possible for adult learners and generally requires learning the language in the home during early childhood, acquiring individuals with pre-existing or native linguistic skills makes sense. As noted by the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Planning and Training, it is easier to train a linguist to be a soldier than a soldier to be a linguist.[24]

Two programs comprise this effort, the Military Accessions Vital to National Interest (MAVNI) program and the 09L program. MAVNI is an enlistment program targeted at non-resident aliens that possess critical language and cultural skills.[25] Enlistment under the MAVNI program can serve as a short-cut to U.S. citizenship for enlistees that are already in the U.S. legally (green card holders), and 16 non-resident aliens have entered the Army as a result of the effort.[26]

The other enlistment program for acquiring service members with pre-existing language skills is the 09 Lima Program. This program is targeted at 'heritage speakers' that already possess U.S. citizenship, generally first generation immigrants that are native linguists in one of the Army's targeted languages.[27] Enlistments under the 09 Lima Program resulted in the activation of the 51st Translator and Interpreter Company in October 2008, a unit that will eventually include over 140 trained translators.[28]

As the Army was tasked by the Office of the Secretary of Defense to develop a program to focus on recruiting native linguists into its ranks back in 2003,[29] whether these programs have been a success or not is open to question. Combined they have produced fewer than 200 linguists in a 5-6 year period, which is far too few to assign linguists to all the operational units needing them. While these programs do put experts in certain languages and cultures in uniform, it is clear that the Army will have to rely on a 'home-grown' linguistic capability to meet current and future mission requirements.

To develop this home-grown capability, the Army needs to drastically expand the numbers of officers and soldiers that receive individualized training in language and culture. In the past the Army has provided language and culture training only to its 'professional community' of linguists; i.e. those in individuals in the career fields of

human intelligence, civil affairs, signal intelligence analysis, Foreign Area Officers (FAO) and to a lesser extent Special Forces personnel.[30] Historically, these were the only Army career fields that required language capability and cultural expertise to perform their primary missions. However, the changing face of warfare and the Army's new focus on stability and counterinsurgency operations has altered the paradigm; language ability and cultural awareness are now clearly recognized as critical warfighting skills for general purpose forces as well as the professional community of linguists.[31]

To meet the demand for greater numbers of personnel with language and cultural expertise, the Army decided to follow an existing training and personnel model. Rather than a revolutionary change in the training and assignment policies of the officer population at large, the Army looked first to evolutionary change using the FAO program as a basis. It is the premise of this paper that this evolutionary change will not meet future demands for the requisite number of officers with the right level of linguistic and cultural expertise. In order to explain why and make recommendations on how those requirements can be met, the FAO program must first be explored.

<u>Foreign Area Officer Program</u>

The FAO program is designed to train and develop personnel to meet the Army's demand for officers with foreign area expertise.[32] FAO officers, frequently referred to as 'soldier - statesmen', combine professional military skills with regional and cultural proficiency, language competency and political-military awareness.[33]   As FAO proponent describes them, FAO officers are "soldiers who are regionally focused experts in political-military operations with advanced foreign language skills and cultural understanding who advise senior decision-makers in all phases of military operations."[34]

The FAO program is a functional area (48) and FAO officers are usually accessed into the program during their seventh year of commissioned service, following successful completion of their basic branch's company grade leader development requirements (usually company command).[35] In accordance with the Officer Personnel Management System XXI, FAO's single-track in FAO positions. That is, once they complete FAO training they spend the rest of their careers working in FAO assignments, rather than returning to their original or basic branch for assignment.

The FAO initial entry training timeline is extensive and generally takes anywhere from three to four and a half years.[36] The normal training progression is to first attend language training, then in-country training and finally advanced civil schooling. This progression may change in the near future as the FAO proponent is exploring ways to reduce that training timeline for select areas of concentration.[37]

FAO officers receive language training in one or more of the languages prevalent in their region of study. Language training is received at either the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center in Monterrey or the Defense Language Institute in Washington, D.C., with courses lasting from six to 18 months depending upon the level of difficulty of the language studied.[38] FAO officers are expected to obtain a minimal proficiency of 2/2/1+ by the end of their basic language training; if they do not they can be removed from the program.[39]

In-country training generally follows basic language training and is designed to immerse the officer in the local language and culture, similar to a study abroad program, with the goal of developing an in-depth knowledge of the country and region through travel and study.[40] The FAO officer lives on the economy where possible and in most

cases attends either a host nation professional military education course or a civilian course of instruction.[41] He/she is expected to travel extensively throughout the area to gain "first-hand knowledge of national and regional cultures, geography, political-military environments, economies, and societal differences."[42] In-country training generally lasts one year, though it can as long as 18 months, and the FAO officer is expected to reach a general professional level in language proficiency (3/3/3).[43]

The final phase of FAO training, Advanced Civil Schooling, is a fully funded 12-18 month graduate program.[44]   FAO officers attend an approved graduate program to obtain a master's degree in a FAO-related discipline; i.e. international relations, international affairs, international security studies, international economics, area studies, regional history, geography, geopolitics, national security studies, social science, political science and strategic intelligence.[45] In addition to their master's degree studies, officers are expected to maintain their language proficiency through elective courses or independent study with faculty.[46]

Once fully trained, FAO officers serve in a variety of overseas and stateside positions in the Army operational, political-military, U.S. country team, and institutional assignment categories.[47] Their primary functions include advising senior leaders on political-military operations with other nations, providing commanders cultural expertise, developing relations with foreign leaders, executing security assistance programs and reporting information on foreign nation activities.[48] To execute these functions, FAO officers are primarily assigned to combatant command headquarters, Army component command headquarters, security assistance billets, Attaché billets, Army staff, OSD staff, JCS staff, DTRA and DIA headquarters.[49]

As a result of single-tracking, trained FAO officers are virtually non-existent on staffs below the combatant command level.[50] The days of FAO officers alternating between FAO assignments and returning to their basic branch for dual-tracked assignments are gone, and thus there are very few FAO officers at present on battalion, brigade and division staffs.

More to the point, of the 137 FAO officers assigned to hazardous duty areas, only 28 are assigned in Afghanistan or Iraq, though FAO proponent has identified additional joint manning document (JMD) billets in Afghanistan and Iraq that FAO officers may fill in the future.[51] Of course, JMD billets are not present below the combatant command and senior staff levels, which means that the FAO officers assigned to Afghanistan and Iraq will not be serving where they are needed most, i.e. at the tactical and lower operational levels with the battalion, brigade and division commanders of maneuver units operating on the ground.

Due to the recognition of the criticality of language ability and cultural awareness gained following the commencement of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Army expanded the definition of 'leader competencies' to include those skill sets and included them in the "Leader Development Strategy for a 21st Century Army".[52] A critical component of the Chief of Staff of the Army's effort to develop the new leader development strategy involved a program titled Army Initiative Five - Accelerate Leader Development, the purpose of which was to review leader development strategies and programs in order to accelerate change in and transform existing leader development programs.[53] To do that, Army Initiative Five took a "focused look at how to accelerate

leader development across all cohorts, components, and domains in order to meet the increased leadership demands for the long war."[54]

In accordance with the Army Initiative Five goal, the Chief of Staff of the Army tasked FAO Proponent to do a top to bottom review of the program in June 2008.[55] During the mandated review, the problem FAO proponent presented to the Chief of Staff of the Army was one of manpower. FAO proponent simply did not have enough FAO officers or authorized billets to meet demand.[56]

Over the past decade FAO proponent accessed on average only 50 officers per year, while their accession requirement was 70 officers per year.[57] Further, FAO proponent lost an average of 63 officers per year to retirement/resignation over the same time frame.[58] To make matters worse, requirements for FAO trained officers have continued to grow by 23 per year since the war in Iraq started.[59]   The bottom line is that of the nearly 1400 trained FAO officers in the Army nearly half are retirement eligible, FAO proponent is losing people faster than they are gaining them, demand is growing and forecasted accessions cannot keep pace.[60]

To mitigate manpower problems, FAO proponent made a number of recommendations to the Chief of Staff.[61]   FAO proponent recommended developing temporary retention incentives to keep trained FAO officers from retiring, realigning the billet structure to provide more support to primary customers at the strategic staff level, challenging requirements that can be met by non-FAO proponent officers and increasing accessions to regain balance and offset projected losses.[62] Quite simply, FAO proponent is recommending small evolutionary changes to maintain the status quo

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within the proponent, rather than a transformation that would 'accelerate leader development'.

FAO proponent's response to the growing needs of the Army at large was typically bureaucratic. Rather than choosing revolutionary change to meet the demands of the operational force, FAO proponent prefers small evolutionary change that will ensure the FAO program and prestige are not 'watered down' through the institution of a reduced training curriculum or an increase in FAO proponent assignments at the tactical level. This response will not help the Army achieve the accelerated leader development sought under the Army Leader Development Strategy and Army Initiative Five, and the Army is left without an existing personnel management program to use as the basis for expansion to meet the growing requirement for culturally aware and linguistically proficient officers in the future.

The Way Forward

> Today's operational environment requires military organizations at all echelons to prepare for a broader range of missions than ever before. The services are preparing for stability operations and post-conflict reconstruction tasks with the same degree of professionalism and study given to the conduct of combat operations. Similarly, COIN operations are receiving the attention and study merited by their frequency and potential impact. This broader mission set has significant leader development, education, and training implications, especially for land forces.[63]

Wars are won, or more to the point, operations are more likely to be successful, when commanders on the ground have a thorough understanding of the operational environment. A thorough understanding of the operational environment enhances a commander's decision making and the integration of his efforts with other elements of national power.[64] Particularly in an "environment characterized by the presence of joint,

interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational partners [such as Iraq and Afghanistan], such understanding is absolutely essential to success."[65]

In order to understand the environment in the areas of operation the U.S. Army is expected to face in the future, a commander first must understand the social dynamics, social networks, local and tribal politics, and cultural mores of the population he will be operating within.[66] Further, for effective cross-cultural communications and to help build the requisite rapport with local leaders, the commander must be able to communicate effectively in the languages spoken in the area of operations. Those requisite traits of cultural understanding and language capability are what the FAO trained officer brings to the table.

The cultural expertise and language capability of a FAO trained officer in the future needs to be available to leaders at all echelons, from tactical through strategic. "The future is not one of major battles and engagements fought on battlefields devoid of population; instead, the course of conflict will be decided by forces operating among the people of the world."[67] The Army's new doctrinal focus recognizes this fact. FM 3-0 (Operations), FM 3-07 (Stability Operations) and FM 3-24 (Counterinsurgency) all stipulate that future operations will be population-centric in that the target, the center of gravity, is the indigenous civilian population, rather than the enemy, and that leaders at all levels, from squad and platoon up, need to positively interact with the populace for victory to be possible. Thus, as squads, platoons, companies, battalions and brigades are the unit levels that are conducting the operations and interacting with the population on a daily basis, they are the units that could make the best use of the cultural and language expertise of a FAO trained officer.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Army has far too few FAO trained officers to meet projected operational requirements at the tactical level. FAO proponent is having manpower problems filling existing billets on strategic level staffs and the branch does not have the capability to grow officers fast enough to meet the tactical, as well as operational and strategic, needs of future operations.[68] Thus, an effort to expand FAO branch will create only enough FAO trained officers to bolster senior staffs; it will not create the numbers of culturally and linguistically trained officers needed in the tactical and operational force.[69]

Revolutionary change is needed to build the requisite numbers of trained officers. This is recognized by the Army's senior leadership and is clearly reflected in the 2009 Army Posture Statement, which states that "it is no longer acceptable for cultural and language capabilities to reside solely with soldiers in specialized skill sets and units; all leaders need to possess these capabilities."[70] The fact that this revolutionary change has "significant leader development, education, and training implications" for the entire force is clearly recognized. [71]

All officers need to receive cultural and linguistic training, not just the officers assigned to specialty career fields. The entire officer corps needs to receive individualized, FAO type training in language and culture. This is a huge cultural change within the Army and can only be accomplished if the following recommendations are implemented.

Recommendation 1: Create a new 'Culture/Language' skill identifier for general purpose force officers that complete a course of instruction similar to that provided to FAO officers. The training for this 'FAO-lite' skill identifier should be based on the FAO

training program, albeit loosely. In fact, the standard FAO training program should be modified broadly to both shorten the training timeline and reduce the costs associated with training a much larger cadre of officers.

Language training of a targeted or operationally useful language should be the first step as it also serves as a vehicle to begin the cultural awareness process. A professional language proficiency level of 2/2/2 need not be the goal for all officers, because the language proficiency required for conducting operations among the population is less demanding than that required of the specialty career fields. Further, there is little benefit for FAO-lite training in reading and writing as reading and writing are not required to interact effectively with the civilian population, particularly in countries like Afghanistan in which the vast majority of the population are illiterate. Thus, the length of the FAO-lite language course could be shortened considerably from the current language training curriculum of FAO proponent officers.

The required language training for receipt of the skill identifier could be a specified time, say six months, rather than a specified proficiency level. This language training could be conducted at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center in Monterrey, the Defense Language Institute in Washington, D.C., or through contract courses of larger bodies of students taught at Army training installations. Contracting instructors for classes taught at Army training installations and increasing the size of the student body in the courses will also reduce associated costs.

The second phase of FAO-lite training can combine the advanced civil schooling and in-country training received by FAO officers. The advanced civil schooling needs to be area or country focused and match the language training previously received. That

is to say, the program of study and the location of training should be matched; if the language training received was Arabic, then the advanced civil schooling and in-country training needs to be focused on, and conducted in, an Arabic country.

The list of approved advanced civil schooling programs FAO officers enjoy should be severely restricted for the FAO-lite skill identifier and should be limited solely to an area or country specific program of study. Studies in the fields of international economics, international relations, political science or strategic intelligence, etc., do not meet the requirements of the tactical force in understanding the culture of the population they are operating within. Even when operating in a cultural environment different than the one trained for, it is more operationally useful from a cross-cultural communications perspective to have studied different *cultures*, rather than say political science or international economics. Further, a master's degree need not be the goal; the standard for receipt of the skill identifier could be a certain number of classes or credit hours.

If that program of study were to occur concurrently with in-country training, the training timeline for the FAO-lite skill identifier would be further reduced. Thus, it would be beneficial to receive the advanced civil schooling within the country or area of study. For example, if the language studied was Arabic, and the country of study was in the Middle-East, then the advanced civil schooling should occur in the Middle-East.

The course of instruction could be taken at any number of civilian institutions or universities in the country of study, or in cases where that would prove impractical, in a country within the region. Additionally, this course of study is likely to be constrained by the students' relative lack of language skills. The classes would need to be taught in English, and though many international universities provide classes taught in English,

some do not. If a suitable university or institution that provides classes in English could not be found, the training could be contracted through any number of language schools operating within the country.

Eliminating, or reducing, the proficiency level required from language training will reduce the timeline for the first phase of training, for most languages, to no more than six months. Reducing the advanced civil schooling requirement from a master's degree to a specified number of courses, and combining advanced civil schooling with in-country training, will allow the second phase of training to occur in 6-12 months. Thus, the overall training timeline for a FAO-lite skill identifier could be in the neighborhood of 12-18 months, as compared to the FAO training timeline of three to four and a half years. The next logical question then, is when to receive the training and the skill identifier.

Recommendation 2: FAO-lite training and award of the skill identifier should occur between the third and fifth year of commissioned service, immediately following attendance at one of the basic branch advanced courses.

Providing the 12-18 months of training immediately following attendance to an advanced course minimizes the disruption to operational units that is caused by removing officers from the ranks for career training.   Officers are generally unavailable for assignment for a year or more as senior lieutenants or junior captains while they attend an advanced course. By tying the FAO-lite training to an advanced course that period is merely increased another 12-18 months and the need to pull officers out of the operational Army a second time for additional career training is precluded.

More importantly, tying the training to attendance at an advanced course ensures that the tactical units that need the cultural and language expertise the most get the maximum benefit from it. Advanced course graduates are generally assigned to tactical elements, either as company commanders or as staff officers at the battalion or brigade level while they wait for a command opportunity. If these junior captains, who usually number 6-7 per battalion, have received the FAO-lite skill identifier prior to that assignment, their expertise would then be available to the units that need it the most, the ones that operate within and have the most interaction with the population and host nation security forces.

These changes represent a major change in Army culture. Yet the Army must adapt its personnel, promotion and assignment policies to meet the needs of the future operational environment. The Army must acknowledge, via promotion potential and assignment prioritization, the importance of cultural awareness and language training.

Recommendation 3: Change the branch qualification requirement for company grade officers to include possession of the FAO-lite skill identifier.

The Army has always valued 'troop time' above all other considerations for company grade officers. In accordance with past and present Army culture, the 'warfighter' is king and the prerequisite for promotion in the general purpose force branches is command; in situations in which command is not possible, then another traditional ticket-punching assignment like operations officer or primary staff officer. The Army has never placed the same value on civilian education as on assignment history and this lack of value has been reflected both in promotion potential and in the selection process for assignments that increase the future promotion potential to higher ranks.

If the Army as an institution places a priority on increasing the cultural awareness and language proficiency of the officer corps, as Army senior leaders profess, the Army must not penalize officers for being 'away from troops' to receive the requisite training. The foremost change must be in promotability. To ensure promotion boards do not penalize officers for time spent in educational pursuits, Army culture must adapt and must give equal weight to education and 'command' experience. Specifically, possession of the FAO-lite skill identifier must carry the same weight as experience gained from a traditional ticket punching assignment. The only way to do this is to ensure that the institution, specifically the promotion boards, consider personnel that possess the FAO-lite skill identifier to be fully branch qualified as company and field grade officers. This must be a specific instruction to the promotion boards to Major and Lieutenant-Colonel.

Similarly, assignment officers need to adapt their policies for selecting officers for priority assignments. If not, long-term promotion potential will suffer.   Current Army culture dictates that priority, generally read ticket punching, assignments be given to the best qualified officer, with best qualified generally defined as the officer with the most relevant assignment history. To ensure that FAO-lite officers do not suffer a lack of promotion potential as a result of failing to be selected for future ticket punching positions, assignment officers must consider the possession of the skill identifier a requirement for selection to ticket-punching positions. The only way to ensure this is by making the possession of the skill identifier mandatory for all general purpose force officers; i.e. it must be considered mandatory for branch qualification.

Conclusion

There is almost universal agreement in military circles that the future environment will be one of persistent conflict and that operations conducted in that environment will be population centric. There is also widespread concurrence that the success of these future operations will depend on the human dimension more than at any time in the past. Military leaders at all levels will need a clear knowledge of the population within which these future operations will take place, and that knowledge will result from effective cross-cultural communications and a clear understanding of the social dynamics, social networks, local politics, and cultural mores of the populace.[72]

The Army has responded to the need for increased numbers of personnel with cultural expertise and language skills in an integrated approach that includes both unit and individual training initiatives. Unfortunately, the current approach will not generate the cultural awareness and linguistic capability required in the future. Though the requisite changes in Army culture and requisite investment in time and money are significant and will prove painful, the way ahead described in this paper will create the cultural expertise and language proficiency senior Army leaders are calling for.

Endnotes

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